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BASA/ THE BERKELEY ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS
BFT/ THE BERKELEY FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

BASA/BFT COMMITTEE ON MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT

FINAL REPORT, AUGUST 1, 1985

We wish to thank the many teachers and administrators
whose help and suggestions made this report possible.

We hope the unorthodox approach used in analyzing our
problems will provide a useful path for solving them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

In October 1984 the Executive Council of the Berkeley Association of School Administrators (BASA) voted to establish an ad hoc committee to study the educational issues raised by the low achievement scores of minority students. Because of the serious problem we are having serving some of the Berkeley students, BASA felt it was essential to involve all segments of the Berkeley Unified staff. To this end, BASA asked the president of the Berkeley Federation of Teachers (BFT) to join a site administrator and a central administrator as co-chair of the committee. Classified and certificated managers and all teachers were invited to participate as active and/or contributing members.

The committee met regularly from early November 1984 through June 1985. Early on, the committee asked all principals to devote a staff meeting to the problems faced by minority students in our schools. By January 1985 we had collected and summarized comments and suggestions from staffs at nearly all elementary and junior high schools. Subsequently, several committee members presented formal plans to improve the district's structure and/or the kinds of instructional programs we offer. This report and our final recommendations incorporate and build upon the site analyses and committee member suggestions. Teacher and administrator input led us to begin examining the problems Berkeley children have from a somewhat different perspective - rather than begin with the characteristics of children who have trouble with our system and progressing to the identification of special programs designed to help them, **WE HAVE BEGUN WITH AN ANALYSIS OF THE TRAITS EXHIBITED BY SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS AND HAVE PROGRESSED TO AN EXAMINATION OF THE WAYS WE TEACH AND ORGANIZE SCHOOL WHICH IMPEDE OR FOSTER THE TRAITS WE SEEK.**

Therefore, instead of thinking of what deficiencies our children have and looking to macro solutions such as smaller classes or more instructional aides, we have focused on ways we can work more compatibly with our children, and consequently, ways we can be more effective in teaching them. This is not to say we have ruled out anything which costs money, rather it is to say that we realize that merely spending money has not achieved the results we had hoped it would. Indeed, some of our suggestions might well have dollar costs down the road, but those costs will flow logically from decisions about how we will foster the development of the traits of successful students rather than out of frustration because macro-programs we have tried so far have not worked.

II. ASSUMPTIONS

This report does not contain a documentation of the problems minority students face in our schools. We begin by accepting as fact that many Berkeley minority students do not do as well as we think they can. We are only too familiar with the small number of minority students who take advanced math and science at the high school and the 40 to 60 percentile test score disparity at the elementary level. **Second**, we assume that despite the powerful societal forces beyond our control, we can make a difference. **Third**, we assume that our teachers and administrators diligently work at teaching all students in Berkeley. We are not asking our staff to work harder; rather, we are suggesting we examine our methods to determine whether we can work more efficiently. **Fourth**, we assume that we do not need something new, instead we need to reexamine what we do in light of what in the past has affected learning. **Fifth**, we assume for the moment that a more effective program resulting from this paper will benefit all of the children of the district.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Much discussion brought us to the student as a beginning point -- specifically, what are those observable student traits which differentiate successful from unsuccessful students. We have initially identified seven characteristics of a successful student. (These traits are presented below.)

From this we asked how life in the classroom could be examined to determine the extent to which it fosters or impedes the development of these traits. Classroom life includes those aspects of the classroom environment, teaching strategies, organization, and the ways teachers interact with students and encourage students to work with one another. Classroom life variables are those which are under the teacher's control.

From the classroom we branched out in two directions: linearly to the roles of the school, the district, and the Board of Education in supporting the best classroom life, and vertically to the way we work with parents of minority students to help them feel comfortable and welcome in school and to help them find a rewarding role in their children's school achievement.

The value in this approach lies in its ability to help us as teachers and administrators decide which activities will most effectively foster those student traits we wish to develop. Proposed activities can be tested before we launch into them. These activities will form the backbone of our regular and special programs; staffing will flow from them. This approach forces us to not define our extra programs in terms of **resource teachers**, or **tutors**, or **instructional aides**, but rather in terms of services to students which we think are best delivered to students in particular ways. Finally, this approach reminds us of the interrelated nature of our positions in serving children. Just as this committee broke new ground in its format of teachers and administrators working together as professionals to solve a common problem, so also do we need to bring our individual beliefs and biases to bear in cooperatively planning at the site and district levels.

Format of the Report

Our conceptual model is displayed below. Following it is a description/analysis of its various aspects. These have led us to some recommendations which are found on pages 12 and 13.

STUDENT OUTCOMES	STUDENT TRAITS	CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT	SCHOOL & HOME SUPPORT	DISTRICT LEADERSHIP & DIRECTION	BOARD OF EDUCATION PRIORITIES

Student Outcomes

We are looking for three observable student outcomes:
1. Higher achievement in class
2. Higher test scores
3. Success in academic secondary classes
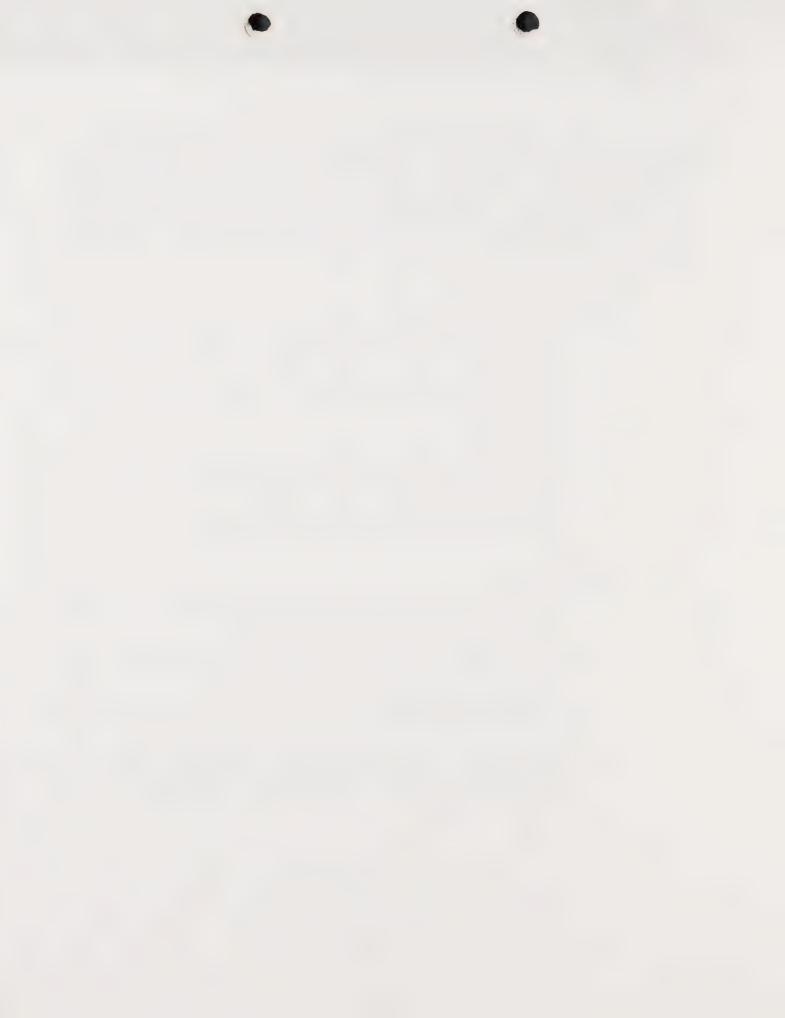
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IV. TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT

We looked at the attributes of a successful student. We identified these characteristics by contrasting our images of successful and unsuccessful students. Obviously, these traits are developmental in nature; that is, students must refine them as they get older. The traits can be loosely differentiated into two categories, cognitive and affective. The affective are presented first because we believe that a child's emotions act as a filter which either magnifies or impedes his/her cognitive development.

a. **Affective** --

   1. The student feels s/he has some control over circumstances affecting her/him and thus takes responsibility for successes and failures.

   2. The student has a sense of her/his own values and uses those values to sort and assess priorities.

   3. The student feels comfortable with her/himself and understands the value of cooperation.

   4. The student feels safe enough to be curious, to question and to volunteer answers.

b. **Cognitive** --

   1. The student expresses her/himself in an articulate manner, orally and in writing.

   2. The student brings to bear learning from past experiences in solving new problems.

   3. The student incorporates new content into her/his analytic system.

   4. The student understands words and the ideas they represent. S/he can apply information, and can recognize relevant information whether   seen, heard or read.

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V.   CLASSROOM PARAMETERS

The committee strongly believes the relationship between the teacher and minority students in the classroom is the most appropriate starting point as we consider whether we are helping children develop the affective and cognitive traits which will help them succeed in school. It is in the classroom that the institution has the most power to control the quality of inter-personal interactions.
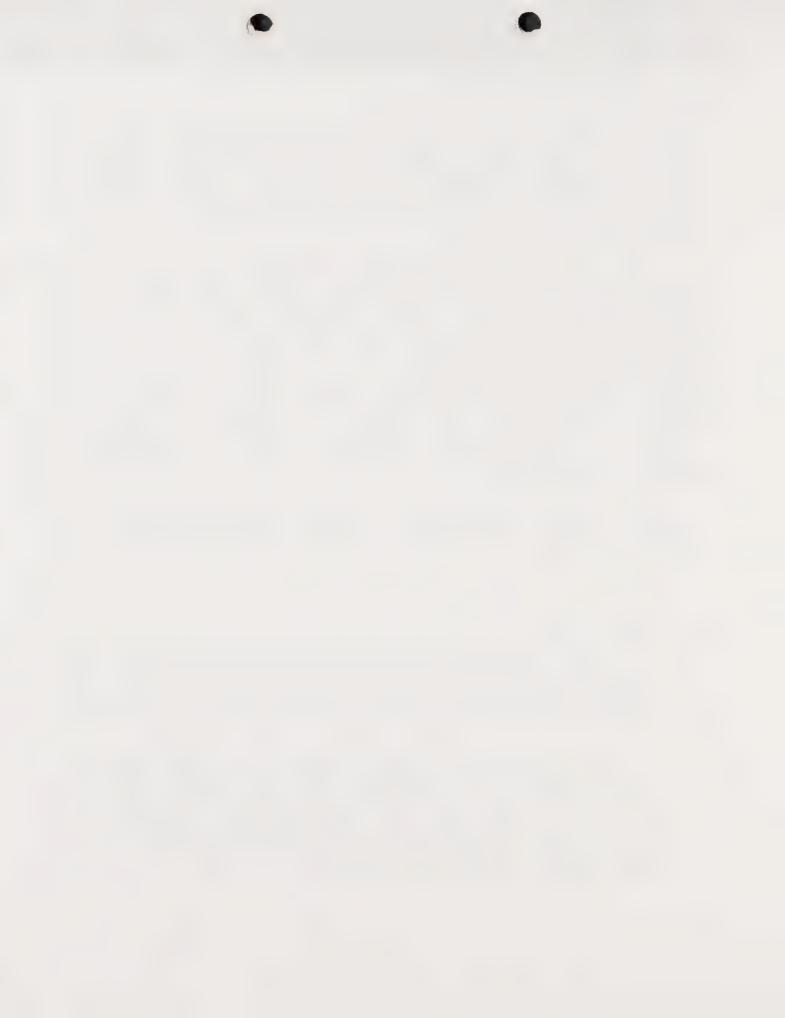
While we have not completed a thorough analysis of all possible factors, we are providing an initial analysis of some of the most obvious things a teacher and principal can look at when assessing the extent to which classroom practices foster or impede student development. As we began looking at the traits we want to develop, it quickly became obvious that school seldom systematically examines the ways we teach such foundation skills as using past experiences to solve on new problems. We also realized that the student characteristics do not include such traditional areas as reading and computing; rather, the traits we identified are generic. They are necessary for students to succeed in the three R's. Thus, the classroom we seek is one which consciously recognizes the value of fundamental skills and attitudes.

This section is divided into three, overlapping aspects of classroom life: environment,   instructional   strategies   and teacher feelings.

1.   Environment

The state's Quality Review document indicates that effective schools have clear expectations of students and provide a place where children feel psychologically safe enough to take some chances and make some mistakes as they learn.

It is only common sense to believe that students will learn to express themselves better if given practice. However, research indicates that (1) most students get very few opportunities to express themselves in structured settings, (2) opportunities must be carefully structured to improve standard English skill of minority students, and (3) minority students' skills suffer more when these opportunities are not provided them.
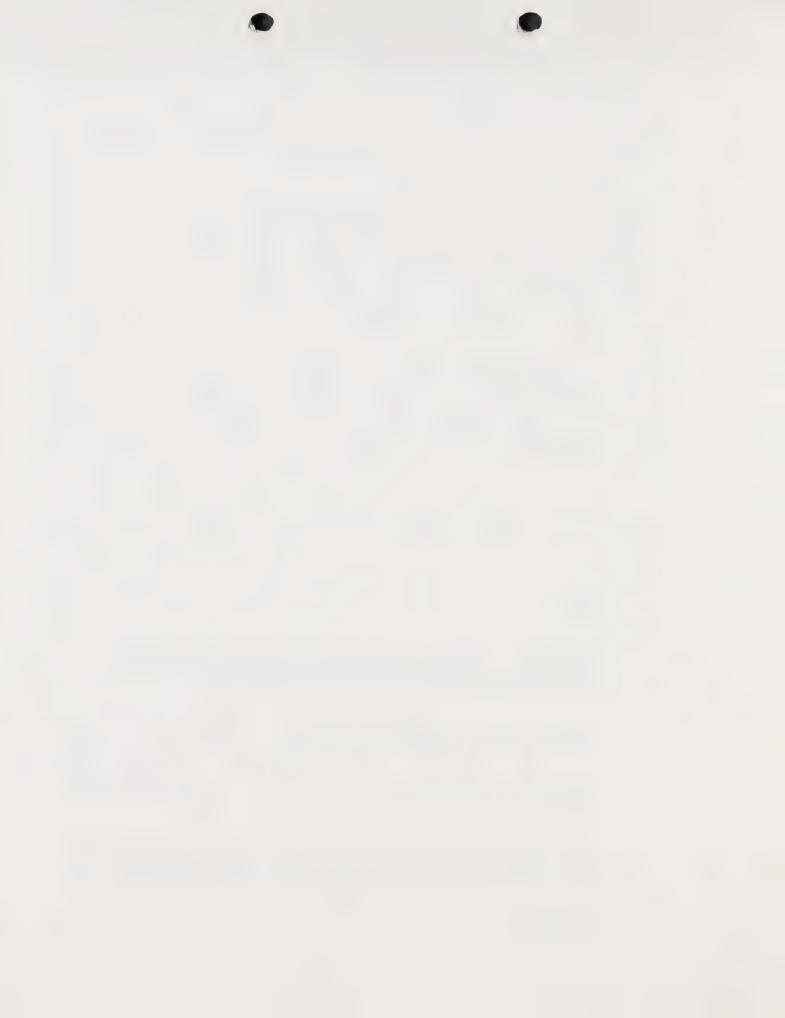
The classroom should be a place where staff share ideas with each other, and where children learn in a safe and caring atmosphere. When teachers specify the curriculum and rules they will follow, they will have the ownership of the program necessary to insure success. It is personal commitment which makes a program work.

Similarly, when students participate in decisions about their lives in school, they begin to take responsibility for their behavior and feel more comfortable with their environment. Student participation begins with small and structured responsibility for defined tasks in a classroom or instructional group. The teacher controls the parameters and gradually increases the span of tasks, time and responsibilities through encouragement and praise.

Parent involvement is less under the teacher's control, but the same levels of consciousness will help the teacher involve parents in the more rewarding aspects of their children's schooling. The teacher's awareness that school was not a comfortable place for many parents as children helps him/her carefully plan non-threatening activities to bring parents into the school.

Specific elements to look for in examining the environment:

Extent to which...

1. **Physical environment is safe, orderly, attractive and clean.**

2. **The teacher arranges room, sets tasks and allots time for tasks and the manner in which students work in a variety of groups and settings throughout the day(elementary)/week(secondary).**

3. **Students' work displayed in such a manner that students feel proud to produce their best.**

4. **Students volunteer and initiate content-related questions and answers.**

5. **The children listen to each other.**

6. **The student will be able to explain the purpose of the classroom activity to an adult who comes into the room.**

7. **Students move freely through the room with emotional security.**

8. Student roles in group tasks are clearly defined.

9. Parents feel they have a constructive and clear role.

10. Students have a secure and consistent relationship with adult working daily in the classroom.

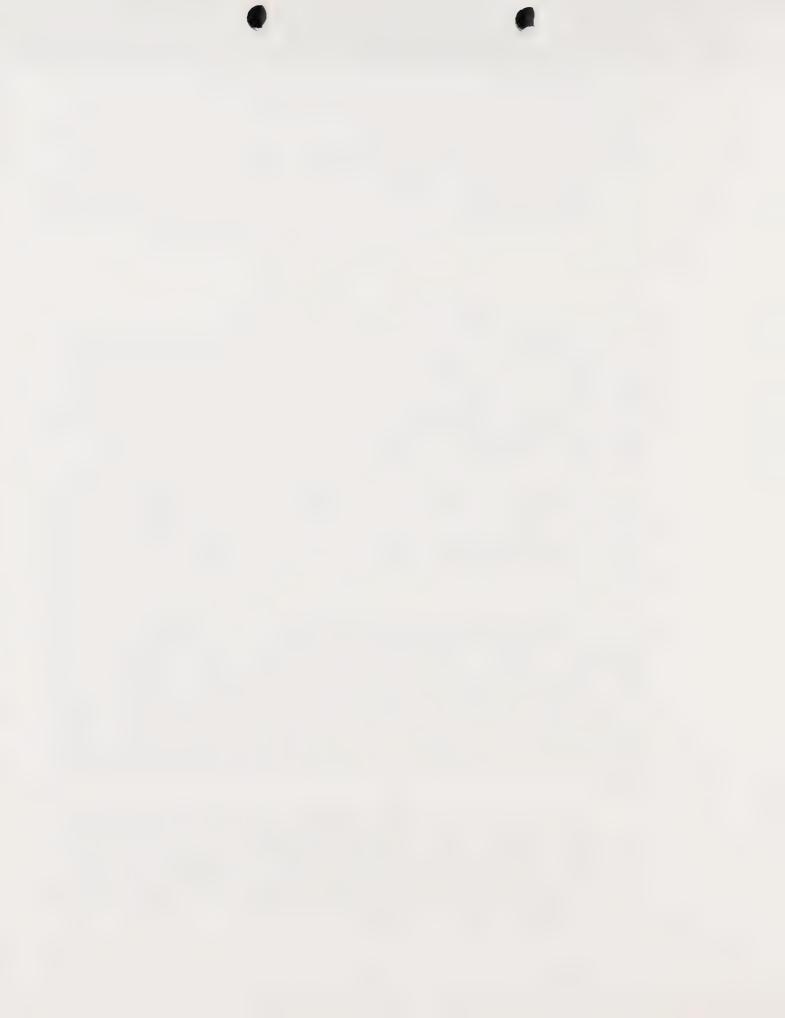11. The teacher's contact with the students affirms the child's worth.

2. <u>Instructional Strategies</u>

Goodlad's **Study of Schooling** again documented the lack of variation in instructional strategies used by teachers, particularly in upper grades. Students spend the vast proportion of their time in the passive and isolating activities of listening and completing factual worksheets. Most of their activities are sequenced by content rather than by underlying conceptual skills. In fact, underlying conceptual skills are rarely consciously taught at all.

A school program needs a clear instructional plan for the school as a whole, for each classroom and for each student. There should be a structured time in the curriculum for essential, conceptual skills to be taught through active involvement as well as time for basic skills and the opportunity to explore the world in exciting and creative ways.

Instructional strategies ought to be varied to reach various learning styles and to increase the interest of all students. Such approaches as **group investigation** give students opportunities to learn how to talk with each other and learn that peers usually have strengths to contribute in an academic setting. Consciously using higher cognitive level questions and being sure that all students have opportunities to participate with curriculum which uses their life experiences in a positive way can motivate even the reluctant student to be expressive in an articulate manner.

Successful students can attack a new problem and deduce or induce answers using past experiences. We need to teach problem-solving and critical thinking in all curriculum areas to all students by leading their thinking and reasoning with conceptually difficult questions and the Socratic method. Time allocation, student involvement and success are correlated with learning.

We also need to teach independent study skills to prepare elementary and secondary students for later grades. One can not assume that students will pick up efficient study skills. Homework can be valuable in assisting students to take more responsibility for their learning, but by itself it will not **teach** study skills.

Lastly, studies have indicated that students having difficulty in school tend to be assigned work which is either too hard or too easy. A study of Berkeley classrooms found that high-achieving students were successful in their work over ninety percent of the time while low-achieving students in the same classrooms were succeeding at only a forty to fifty percent rate. Obviously, it is hard for students to maintain interest when one is frustrated regularly over a long period of time. Low-achieving students need and deserve both recognition and the opportunity to succeed regularly.

Specific elements to look for in examining instructional strategies:

Extent to which . . .

1. An observer would see several instructional strategies, most of which require student participation and involvement, within a day (elementary)/ a week (secondary).

2. The teacher leads students to hypothesize and draw conclusions through structured questions.

3. Students succeeding most of the time. This is more important for lower than higher achieving students.

4. Students are given formal and informal feedback on their work, whether by the teacher or by other students.

5. Homework is clearly presented, is regularly assigned, and is do-able within a reasonable length of time.

6. The district, school and teacher priorities match.

7. The teacher calls on all students equally and gives students enough time to answer.

8. The teachers use strategies which encourage students to volunteer and to initiate content-related questions.

9. Students have been taught and have been given opportunities to consolidate the content and to display their learning before being formally tested.

3. Teacher Attitude

Teachers need to enjoy working with young people and to care about their education. They must not only believe they can make a difference but also must convey to students the sense that the students have the personal power to learn. The site administrator plays a pivotal role in combatting the sense of isolation teachers can experience when working apart from other adults for long periods of time.

The teacher sets the tone in the classroom. This tone, in large part, determines the extent to which students will develop the four affective traits described above.

Through their verbal and non-verbal behavior, teachers present expectations, rules and the classroom's tonal quality. Teachers promote student responsibility by soliciting their opinions, setting reasonable standards of performance for each student and expecting students to complete assignments.

Still, research indicates that high-achieving students are given longer to answer questions than are low-achieving students; that teachers direct most questions to high-achieving students; that teachers treat students who sit past the first three rows as being less interested; that teachers show more enthusiasm and higher levels of personal interest in academically advanced and verbally articulate students. These behaviors tend to become self-fulfilling prophesies.

Specific elements to look for in appraising teacher attitude:

Extent to which . . .

1. The teacher conveys the message to students that s/he is confident students can and should succeed.

2. The teacher indicates lower academic children can learn.

3. Students believe they can learn and are learning.

4. Student opinions are solicited.

5. The teacher is part of the school and is a school policy maker.

6. Students act respectfully toward one another.

7. Evidence of principal's leadership in curriculum/instruction and respect for the school's teachers as professionals.

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4. Parent Support and Involvement

Parent support makes a substantial difference in students' abilities to become articulate manner in spite of differences among families and cultures. The quality of support that parents give through encouragement, providing time and space for study and homework, reducing television, modeling reading, and giving responsibility varies from home to home.

Teachers help minority parents believe school success is possible, is worth the struggle, and is an enjoyable and satisfying part of sharing the wonder of growing up with their children.

Educational research has found clear correlations between parents' reading to children and children's later reading ability, as well as between parents' receipt of a daily newspaper and children's reading scores.
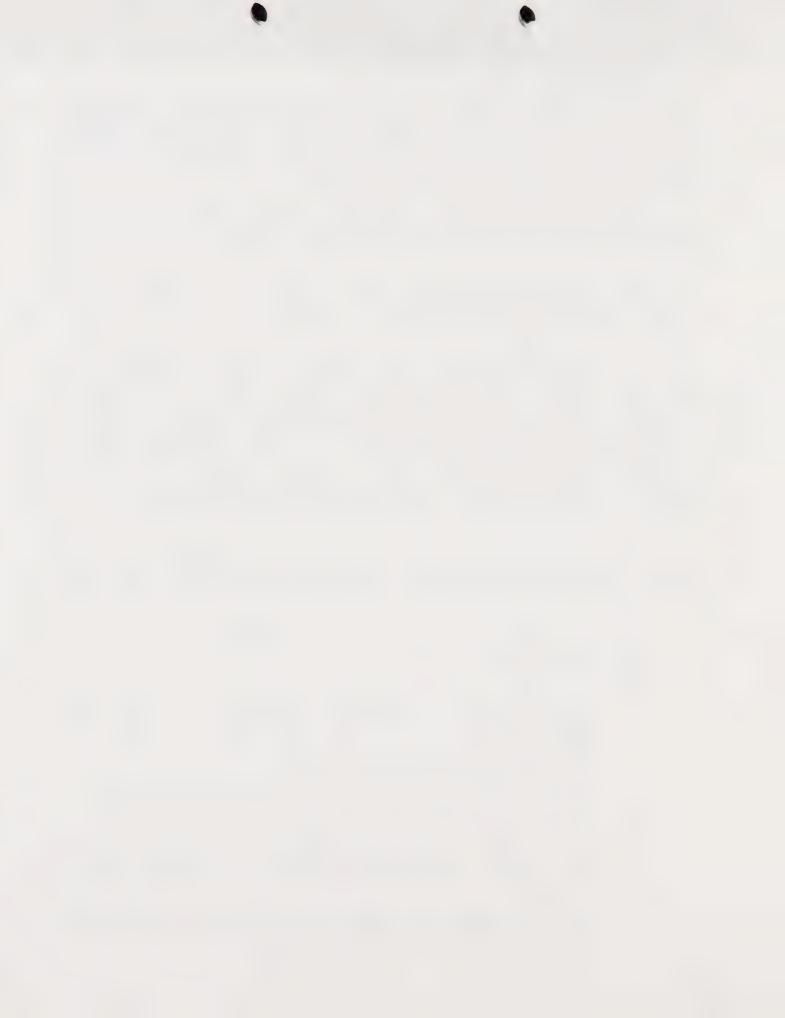
The connection becomes even clearer if one considers that children function best in a comfortable, familiar environment. Thus, the closer the environment at home matches that of the classroom, the more comfortable children feel in the classroom. If parents encourage their children to orally work through tasks and situations at home, the children will be comfortable working orally through problems at school. If children are used to spending some quiet time each evening reading, writing or drawing, they will feel comfortable doing these things at school. Once comfortable, everyone learns more efficiently.

The school's role is to help parents feel capable of doing some of these things at home while assuring parents that their children can learn at school. Schools can design specific plans.

Specific elements to look for in examining parent support and involvement:

Extent to which . . .

1. **Parents listen to, talk with and read to their child every day.**

2. **Parents play with their children.**

3. **Parents provide homework space and a quiet setting.**

4. **Parents limit passive activities, e.g. television.**

5. **The teacher talks with parents about their child's potential.**

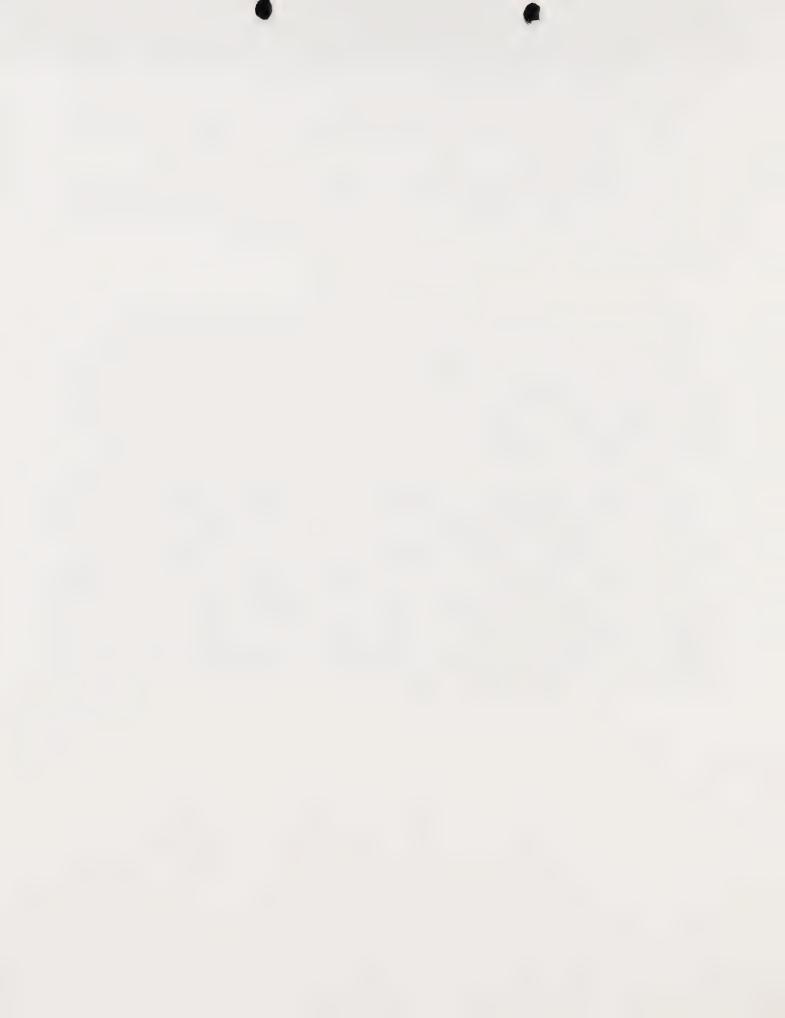6. **The school provides help for parents so that parents can work with their children on homework.**

7. Most of the homework the school assigns, the student can do without having to ask for help.

8. The school provides opportunities, such as Family Math, in which children can both teach and learn with their parents.

9. The school reaches out into community institutions, such as churches, to talk with and learn from parents.

5. School Support/District Support/Board of Education Support

There is a logical progression from broad to specific. The Board and District need to set priorities, to provide the resources to accomplish them, and to minimize the distractions at the school level. The school, a community of teachers working with a principal, needs the opportunity to determine its own path toward reaching these goals.

For example, were the Board and District to accept the process outlined above - progressing from student outcomes to the skills of students need to reach those outcomes, to the kind of classroom that will foster them, etc. - the Board's role would be to demonstrate its importance by allocating extensive time and sufficient funds while limiting anything which might distract staff.   The district's role, in turn, would be to set annual goals and provide necessary resources to carry it out and monitor progress.   The school would evaluate its own program in light of these considerations and would draw up a plan to reach the district's annual goal. At each level, all special programs would be reviewed to assess the extent to support the goals, and would be modified accordingly.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are intended to stimulate discussion rather than to be definitive. To this end, they are structural and general in nature. (Many excellent specific suggestions were presented by individual committee members. These will be available to the staff group which will map out the district plan.) Staff should think of these in view of the student traits we want to foster, mesh them with suggestions from the Citizen's Advisory Committee, and design a workable schedule of implementation.

FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

1. School Site Level

    This fall, a site committee will write a school plan that addresses the areas of classroom environment, teaching strategies, organization of the student's day and student-teacher interaction. The plan should focus specifically on practices that will help children develop the traits of a successful student. It will be reviewed by a committee of central and site administrators and teachers.

2. District Level

    a. The district should provide time for the extensive discussions necessary to build consensus about specific, attainable site plans. The district should demonstrate the importance of addressing minority achievement by funding the planning time.

    b. Central administration should review all federal, state and district-funded programs (UCO, Comp.Ed., Specialized Ed., kindergarten aides, pull-outs, bilingual, G&T, etc.) to determine ways to make them compatible with the instructional program needed to help children develop the characteristics they will need to succeed.

    c. The district should plan staff development in alternative instructional strategies which will encourage active involvement and will reduce student and group isolation.

    d. The district should review the following structural elements of the institution to determine the extent to which they foster or impede student development: grade configuration, grouping practices, scheduling, parental choice, use of text and reproducible materials, etc.

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3. Board of Education

    a.   The Board should conduct an evaluation of the district and outside-funded instructional programs to generate hard evidence of the program characteristics which are successful with minority students.

    b.   The Board should review funding and program proposals based on the extent to which they will help the institution change and better serve its students. It should discourage the district from funding programs which do not improve the ways its permanent staff work with children.